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ABSTRACT

Counselor education programs most often prepare their graduates to work in either a school setting, anywhere from the elementary level through higher education, or a community agency. There is little indication that counselor education programs have seriously undertaken the task of training counselors to enter the correctional field. If corrections is to become the new arena for counselors, it becomes the responsibility of counselor educators to provide their students with the option to gain the additional knowledge, skills, and experiences considered requisite in the world of corrections. The purpose of this paper is to outline a model for such an option. The model has, as its basic core traditional counseling courses such as Counseling Theories, Standardized Testing, Communications Skills Seminars, and Practicum. It adds to these a proposed series of options such as Criminal Justice System, Abnormal Psychology, Personality Theories, Psychopathology, Projective Techniques for Personality Assessment, and Field Placement, which should provide optimal skills for a counselor to function in a correctional setting. The rationale for these options is discussed at length. (Author)

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COUNSELOR EDUCATION FOR CORRECTIONS

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ABSTRACT

It has been suggested that there exists a potential for job opportunities in the corrections field for counselors. However, counselor education programs most often prepare their graduates to work either in a school setting, anywhere from the elementary level through higher education, or in a community agency. There is little indication that counselor education programs have seriously undertaken the task of training counselors to enter the correctional field.

If corrections is to become the new arena for counselors, it becomes the responsibility of counselor educators to provide their students with the option to gain the additional knowledge, skills, and experiences considered requisite in the world of corrections. The purpose of this paper is to outline a model for such an option.

The model has, as its basic core, traditional counseling courses such as Counseling Theories, Standardized Testing, Communications Skills Seminars, and Practicum also proposes a series of option such as Criminal Justice System, Abnormal Psychology, Personality Theories, Psychopathology, Projective Techniques for Personality Assessment and Field Placement, which should provide optimal skills for a counselor to function in a correctional setting. The rationale for these options are discussed at length. (Author)

COUNSELOR EDUCATION FOR CORRECTIONS

It has been suggested that potential job opportunities exist for counselors in the field of corrections (Dye & Gluckstern, 1974) in juvenile homes, training schools, half-way houses, local jails, state and federal prisons, and within the courts. In 1973 the National Conference of the Association of Social Workers committed themselves to working in the corrections field. However, there is little indication that counselor education programs and particularly rehabilitation counselor training programs have seriously undertaken the task of training counselors to enter the correctional field.

The role of the correctional counselor is really threefold. In addition to the traditional role of therapist, he must also act as an institutional change agent and a resource developer-manager. If corrections is to become a viable employment alternative for our graduates, it becomes the responsibility of counselor educators to provide their students with the option to gain the additional knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary to meet the demands of those roles.

In addition to the traditional counseling courses such as Counseling Theories, Educational Testing, Communications Skills, and Practicum, a corrections option should include courses such as the Criminal Justice System, Group Processes, Resource Management, Personality Theories, Abnormal Psychology or Psychopathology, Psychological Testing, and an Internship in a Correctional setting.

Knowledge of the criminal justice system is an essential tool for the corrections counselor in all three of their roles. The complex correctional language might as well be Greek to most of us. It is extremely difficult to understand and communicate with officials, judges, lawyers, and offenders without an introduction to the criminal code, roads of evidence, probation, and parole. For example, a sentence of ten years, in Michigan, really means, at the most, seventy months. In other words, seven months is the equivalent of one year in their language. There are going to be legal or official parameters in any correctional setting, which are above and beyond those of professional ethics, within which the counselor as therapist or resource manager must operate lest he jeopardize his clients and/or himself. Just an understanding of a prison's political hierarchy (which is not always the same as the organizational chart) can go a long way to help a counselor who is attempting to effect some kind of change in that type of closed setting.

The large case load, which is practically universal when working with offenders, makes it almost requisite for the counselor to be well versed in group processes. In addition to the efficiency of group work, much evidence points to the effectiveness of offender groups. After surveying nearly a hundred state and federal institutions, the 1968 Joint Commission on Correctional Manpower and Training found that other inmates have the greatest influence on the offender.

In fact, one way to facilitate change in a correctional setting through a group process is to train inmates in communications skills. Helping inmates learn to discriminate verbal responses in terms of understanding,

respect, genuineness, self-disclosure, and concreteness increases cooperation between inmates and corrections workers (Davis, et al, 1976). Additionally, these communication skills give inmates a greater sense of control over their rehabilitation and provide them with a tool for helping each other.

A Group Processes course should include an introduction to the three types of group processes; task-process, socio-process, and psycho-process (Betz, 1973) and cover functional examples of each; provide general guidelines for leaders; and discuss the special problems one may encounter with offender groups.

All three types of groups are applicable to the correctional setting. The Therapeutic Community (Jones, 1968) and Guided Group Interaction (Larson, 1970) are two group models often found in correctional literature which seem to bridge all three process groups. The Therapeutic Community provides real life practice grounds for more appropriate social behaviors. In Guided Group Interaction, a small group acts as both social controller and therapist for each group member.

Three important considerations make the task oriented vocational/career exploration group one of the most functional group processes in corrections. First, the employed ex-offender is less likely to become a recidivist. Second, it has been shown that employment ranks overwhelmingly as the top priority need of parolees and probationers (Dell'apa et al, 1976). Third, the fact that many occupations are closed to offenders makes career decision making and educational planning even more vital for this group.

Eric Bernes's (1961) Transactional Analysis, which lends itself beautifully to the group process because of its focus on interactions, has been

acknowledged as an effective socio-process model in correctional therapy (Nicholson, 1970). T.A. is particularly helpful in the treatment of offenders because it can be used to explore the games both staff and inmates use to hinder rehabilitation.

Family simulation, drug and alcohol abuse, and sexuality are just a few of the special focus groups that are widely employed in correctional settings.

Most group processes include at least some of the following guidelines for leaders. The leader should be able to guide discussions, provide continuity, without becoming the group's focal point. When appropriate, the leader should clarify the group's understanding of issues and behavior. When group sessions become gripe sessions it may be necessary for the leader to step in and shift the focus from the complaints to the complainers, to get back to personal problems, feelings, and ideas. It is also the leader's responsibility to keep the group's goals concrete and within reach.

Group work with offenders is both difficult and different for several reasons. First, the fact that the helping professional is viewed as a fairly powerful person in any group setting is accentuated in the offender group. The counselor who sets himself up to be "leader" rather than "facilitator" in an offender group automatically sets up a one-way communication system. Group members see the "leader" as a possible advocate for their release and will tend to interact with him, (usually talking a lot but saying nothing) rather than with each other in hopes of making a favorable

impression. The group process then becomes a manipulation game, a vying for the "leader's" approval and/or attention, rather than a tool for problem solving. Second, offenders are characteristically action oriented. They have learned that they get more attention through acting out than they do through talking out. Unaccustomed to verbalizing at the feeling level, offenders often have a deficient feeling vocabulary. Even with a feeling vocabulary established, offenders are fairly unwilling to disclose anything that would make them appear weak or less tough (in other words, human). The juvenile, adult, male or female offender will defend his/her "macho" image at almost any cost . . . sometimes even to the point of further self-defeat. Third, the power of peer pressure in the correctional setting cannot be overlooked. Because of the "them vs us" relationship established by the traditional corrections system, any form of free expression with the staff is seen as snitching.

One of the chief dichotomies of corrections lies in the fact that while the intended purpose of incarceration is the reform or rehabilitation of the offender, the process of incarceration itself prevents it. Custodial goals are often in conflict; for example, the goals of self-development and self-sufficiency of inmates may not be compatible with the needs for control and security (Dye & Sansouci, 1974).

It is the above mentioned dichotomy that provides the counselor-therapist in corrections with several communications barriers to deal with from the word go. All that we learn and believe about being able to help only those who want to be helped goes right through those barred windows. Your client, quite obviously, does not want to be where he is. It is more often than not that your client has not come to you voluntarily. He has probably been assigned to your parole or probation case load, group home, prison unit,

jail, etc. It is not uncommon for individual or group counseling to be a part of an offender's sentence or stated as a condition of probation or parole. As a result you find yourself with an at best reluctant and at worst hostile client. Second, despite our efforts to remain loyal to the notion of unconditional positive regard, our own socialized labels, if you will, can get in the way when a hostile, street-wise con man struts into our office. Even if we succeed in escaping from our own labels we must contend with the labels offenders will give us. How we are initially labeled becomes a third barrier. In our country convicted offenders are more often from the lower socio-economic class. For these people the professional is both feared and resented for his perceived power. We, the college educated middle-class, cannot possibly understand the nature of our clients' experience. The trust which we all understand to be essential for the development of a growth-producing counseling relationship is more difficult to establish because your client views you as part of "the system", one of "them". Overcompensating for his position in life and in response to the inevitable testing games, the new corrections counselor often finds himself out on the proverbial "about to be sawed off limb" when he attempts to "prove" to his client that he is there to help, not punish. If you are new to corrections, you are going to get caught in the "Let Me See How Much I Can Get From My Counselor" game. Once you have been had you will be better able to recognize manipulation and learn how to confront your clients. One way to prevent some manipulation is to set up limits for yourself and let your clients know what those limits are.

Regardless of what the corrections counselor perceives his role to be

within the correctional setting, he must also view himself as a community resource developer-manager. In the role of resource developer-manager, counselors "systematically identify the individual's needs while still inside a correctional process and link those needs with the resources and programs within the community" (Ivey, 1974). After his release, the ex-offender's future depends not only on the level of emotional reorientation you have helped him to establish, but also on how effectively you have linked him to community resources. This additional role necessitates a course in the counselor education option for corrections entitled Resource Management which should include:

the "how to's" of (1) the politics of social action; (2) utilization of media; (3) grant writing and proposal development for demonstration projects; (4) working with boards, commissions, and councils, and; (5) community organization and social action (Dell'apa et al, 1976).

Even though corrections is moving away from the medical model, the counselor will nevertheless encounter more personality disorders in a correctional setting than in any other social institution, excepting of course, the mental health facility. It is because of this inevitability that courses such as Personality Theory and Deviant Individual or Psychopathology should be a part of the correctional counselor's training. A course in Psychological Testing is also useful to the corrections counselor not only as a therapeutic tool but also as an employable skill as psychological testing is still widely used in corrections. Perhaps these courses could be required cognates offered through either the parent department or other appropriate departments within the institution.

An internship in a correctional setting holds several advantages for the counseling student. The chill of "the system" can be a fairly disconcerting experience for the student who has been nurtured by warm and empathic classmates and professors. The internship not only provides "hands in, feet in" exposure to that system, but in addition, an opportunity to assimilate and share his feelings toward it with his peers and mentors. The first time a counselor falls victim to a con is always an embarrassing and painful experience, but the blow is somewhat softened when that counselor is "just an intern". The internship allows the student to interact with "real offenders", deal with his own labels and fears, and experiment with limits.

Corrections is a different world. If counselors are going to be more than "harmless" (Dye & Gluckstern, 1974) in the field of corrections, counselor educators must prepare their students with the knowledge and skills to understand the criminal justice system, facilitate various types of groups, develop and manage community resources, and conduct psychological testing as well as to fulfill the traditional role of the one-on-one therapist.

The last extended work in rehabilitation related to offenders was completed in 1967. The problems within the corrections field do not appear to be ameliorating themselves. This suggests that there is a need for a renewed thrust from the field of rehabilitation and particularly rehabilitation counselor educators in the area of corrections for the training of counselors who can effectively aid in the rehabilitation of the offenders of this country.

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